

Appendix D

Newspaper Articles

Northwest Florida Daily News- March 25, 2004

Kari Barlow

*Navarre residents hope to shape development

■ Four groups will examine infrastructure, architecture, land use and landscaping.

By KARI C. BARLOW

Daily News Staff Writer

Navarre homeowner Joanne Connor knows growth is unavoidable in the booming

waterfront community.

She just wants the growth to make sense.

Most of all, she wants Navarre to feel more like a town.

"In Navarre, there is no downtown," said Connor, who lives in the Crescent III subdivision. "We've got the post office at one end and the library at the other. It would be better to have a more community atmosphere."

Connor will join a host of other Navarre residents

tonight at Holley-Navarre Middle School for the first of several community meetings about shaping development.

Participants in the grassroots effort, which was initiated by Santa Rosa County Commissioner Gordon Goodin,

Please see NAVARRE/B2

IF YOU GO

The Navarre town center meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. this evening at Holley-Navarre Middle School. For more information, call the Santa Rosa Board of County Commissioners at 983-1877.

NAVARRE

From B1

will form four working groups to examine infrastructure, architecture, land use and landscaping in Navarre.

"With the four-laning of Highway 87, I expect the development to really take off out there," Goodin said. "We need

some definitions. We need to go through and let the community decide what they want."

The chairmen of the four working groups will form a steering committee that will make specific recommendations to county commissioners.

"We see this as a community-driven plan," said Kacey Wagg, county planner. "It's their home. The more active they are, the more accurately it will

reflect their issue and concerns."

Wagg said the groups could help Navarre create more of a town center and decide if it wants more amenities such as sidewalks, streetlights and landscaping.

"One of the things we'll be talking about is where is Navarre, where are the boundaries," she said.

Wagg said she expects much

of the discussion to center around development along Navarre's main thoroughfare.

"There's no way to talk about Navarre without talking about U.S. (Highway) 98," she said.

Wagg added that the widening of State Road 87 would improve the look and feel of Navarre's central area.

"The visual quality of the development, with sidewalks and streetlights and landscap-

ing, is so much better than having endless asphalt," she said.

Other topics that Wagg and Goodin expect will come up are signage, curbing high density development, curb and gutter guidelines, septic tank abatement and walkable communities.

■ Staff Writer Kari C. Barlow can be reached at karib@nwfdailynews.com

Pensacola News Journal- January 8, 2004
Mark O'Brien

Prime time now for Navarre to decide what it wants to be as it grows

Everyone knows Navarre is exploding with growth as Publix, Waffle House and other businesses follow residents flocking to south Santa Rosa County.

But they don't know the answers to other questions: What is Navarre, and what does Navarre want?

"It's kind of like Pace - it's everywhere," said County Commission Chairman Don Salter, referring to the sprawling nature of another rapidly growing community.

That's why commissioners expect to talk today about establishing a committee to help Navarre decide what it wants to be as it grows.

It's often linked in people's minds by long ties to Holley and Navarre Beach, but Navarre is a growing community unto itself. New stores and homes testify to the boom, which also brings more visitors.

"Publix put us on the map," said County Commissioner Gordon Goodin, noting the impact since the popular grocery giant opened a Navarre store last year.

Goodin said the committee will have plenty of topics to consider - everything from boundaries to names, from signage to roads.

"I don't pretend to have all the answers," said Goodin, eager for residents and business operators to lead the way.

Expect plenty of interest.

The community's attention was piqued by a proposal to build 13-story condominiums on U.S. 98, the main east-west thoroughfare.

Even before hundreds of people turned out in opposition this week, the developer withdrew an application for commission approval.

Now residents can take the logical next step and begin debating what they want the area to become.

Growth brings money, but it also brings costs, taxing fire service and straining already-stressed roads.

People in Navarre talk about luring professional offices and upscale restaurants without dramatically changing the current zoning.

"We also would like some quality shopping so we don't have to trek to Okaloosa County or Escambia County," said Sue Peters-Ferree, a representative of the group opposing the high-rise condominiums.

Goodin tentatively dubbed the area Navarre Town Center and said it would cover about 2.5 miles along U.S. 98, from Williams Creek Drive on the west to Baptist Medical Park on the east, and extend along State Road 87 toward nearby Holley.

Adding trees and improving the area's appearance would pay big results and make roadfront property more valuable.

Goodin is already hearing citizens who wish for sidewalks and other improvements.

"A little preventive maintenance would go a long way," said Goodin, who draws many of his ideas from a similar effort under way in the Central Florida community of Maitland (www.itsmymaitland.com).

Goodin said efforts fail when they rely on the hammer of government rather than the lure of economic rewards.

"Everything that's here now should be grandfathered," he said.

But residents can begin crafting ways to resolve the jumble of signs, the confusion of driveways, and the unsightliness of plainly visible retention ponds.

Whether motorists find significant relief on congested U.S. 98 remains to be seen. It, like State Road 87 and U.S. 90, is a state-maintained road, and officials in Tallahassee say they don't have enough money to solve the problems.

Even so, the community can be developing a valuable road map and making Navarre a better place to live.

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Pensacola News Journal- March 30, 2004
Mark O'Brien

Navarre is smart to look down the road at ups and downs of growth

Many things made sense once upon a time but don't look so smart now, thanks to 20-20 hindsight.

Years ago it seemed good to put schools and churches close to U.S. 98 in Gulf Breeze. But expansion of the Pensacola Bay Bridge today might not be so complicated if fewer institutions bordered the increasingly busy road.

And think how different Pensacola would be today if leaders of another era hadn't plunked a wastewater treatment plant near downtown.

So it's encouraging to see Navarre residents turning out in large numbers to say what they want their community to be in 20 years.

It's extra nice because this effort can be driven by residents and business owners, not government officials.

It's none too soon, either.

Thanks to rapid growth, Navarre is a jumble of old and new, modest and flashy, mom-and-pop operations and big-name stores.

Busy U.S. 98, the main east-west route through South Santa Rosa County, offers a disconnected blur: day spa, auto body shop, Church's Chicken, Ace Hardware, Publix grocery store.

And nearby Highway 87 is being widened, sure to spur more development.

The bustle and sprawl mean people often differ over the boundaries of Navarre, let alone its future.

All the more reason to plan.

"Work smart, but work fast," County Commissioner Gordon Goodin urged 100 residents at a meeting that started the planning.

Two good steps make this different from other efforts:

- Rather than hearing a lengthy dissertation from planners, residents were divided into four groups to list their own wishes and fears.
- Residents signed up for committees to deal with land use, signs, roads and other issues.

This reduces politics and encourages citizens more than the standard method of commissioners appointing people to committees.

"We're here with as blank a slate as possible to get information from you," said Kacey Wagg of the county's planning department.

Commissioners chose this tack to encourage people to speak out.

And speak out they did, often mentioning advantages and threats common to residents in other areas of Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

Traffic, poor roads and environmental concerns topped the list.

Some speakers wanted to retain the uncrowded feel by keeping an emphasis on low-density housing.

And retirees in particular wanted more medical facilities.

Navarre's pluses also can be minuses.

People like the low taxes but acknowledge that the county has little money for bike paths, parks and other improvements they envision.

The limited number of restaurants and stores minimizes traffic but also limits choices for residents and revenue for government.

More attractions would mean "our tax dollars are not always fleeing to Okaloosa and Escambia counties," said one resident, Karin Heaton.

For the next few months the committees will meet to refine preferences, then take them to the Planning Board and the County Commission for approval.

Many wishes will require time and money, but some - signs and landscaping - can be done quickly.

The meeting encouraged Goodin.

"A lot of good stuff will come out of this," he said.

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Pensacola News Journal- May 17, 2004
Derek Pivnick

Workshops attempt to steer Santa Rosa growth
'Town Center' meetings allow citizen input
Derek Pivnick@PensacolaNewsJournal.com

Going to town could have new meaning in Santa Rosa County.

Navarre residents are shaping their part of the county's future in "Town Center" workshops to last through summer.

The Pace-Pea Ridge area may be next, as the idea could spread to other stretches of the county. But it will have to wait for those in Navarre to finish.

Their next meeting is 5:30 p.m. Tuesday at Holley-Navarre Middle School.

"That process can really work for Pace-Pea Ridge," said Commissioner Robert Hilliard.

The town center concept could mean central shopping or business districts, more uniform architecture and landscaping and more sidewalks in highly populated, unincorporated areas of the county.

"I think it's a step in the right direction because it allows input from citizens," said Sue Peters-Ferree of Navarre. "I'm hoping that it will be a very successful process."

Navarre residents see some of the county's fastest growth. Pace is not far behind. Dozens of residents are taking part in the Navarre workshops, which began in March and are set to conclude in August with recommendations to the County Commission.

Commissioner Gordon Goodin, whose district includes Navarre, borrowed the concept of developing a town center from the central Florida city of Maitland, which revitalized its commercial district.

Some changes may happen quickly - adding curbs and stormwater retention ponds - but overall it will be an evolutionary process, Goodin said.

"I think it will take at least a generation to make a change," he said.

Growth in the county is not isolated to Navarre, and what happens with Navarre may be a template for other unincorporated areas of Santa Rosa.

"In the Pace-Pea Ridge area, there seems to be kind of a very broad development," Hilliard said. "It's conceivable that more than one town center could develop, and that could be a good result."

Incorporation, often a controversial issue with county residents, isn't required for this to work, Goodin said.

"It's going to cost some money, but I think we can do it without raising taxes," he said.

Borrowing against the expected increase in property values is one of Goodin's suggestions.

Goodin said mobile homes were placed on commercially zoned property in Navarre, a signal to him redevelopment needed to occur.

"It was something that Navarre was past ready for," he said. "I knew we had a problem."

Telling people what to do with their property also can be controversial, but workshops seem to have been constructive so far.

"I'm not going to tell you it's been a lovefest, but it's been pretty nice," Goodin said.

How it works

Dozens of Navarre residents are taking part in workshops that could help determine how other areas of Santa Rosa County take shape:

May

Working group meetings.

June

Working group meetings.

Steering committee meetings.

July

Steering committee meetings.

County staff begins to finalize plan.

Public meetings (can be held sooner if needed).

August

Final plan presented to County Commission. Public hearings scheduled.

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Navarre Press Articles

January 15, 2004

Board OKs forming committee to guide Navarre's growth

By Ken Garner
Navarre Press

Santa Rosa County Commissioner and "sand man" Gordon Goodin recently has made dream-weaving a top priority.

"The urgency I sense with the four-laning of State Road 87 makes it important that we act now," Goodin said of creating a committee to plan Navarre's future growth. "This isn't something we can wait around about."

The Specialty Sand Products owner said he's been busy talking with Navarre-area business and community leaders, "planting the seeds" of his plan to lead growth, not follow it.

"I'm not wanting this to be a situation where we're shoving a bunch of ordinances down people's throats," Goodin said. "I'm in favor of using economic and market forces to get people to buy into this."

The steering committee should be composed of Navarre residents to ensure the plan is "for Navarre, by Navarre," he said, adding that architectural, engineering and planning experts should be included for their technical assistance. Goodin's colleagues on the Board of County Commissioners officially blessed the idea Thursday, giving staff the go ahead to begin organizing the committee.

The steering committee's first step would be designating what Goodin calls the "Navarre Town Center," a 2.5-mile stretch along U.S. Highway 98 from Baptist Medical Park west to Williams Creek Drive, and north on State Road 87 toward Holley, where most of the area's business activity is clustered.

The recommendations, which would have to be approved by the Local Planning Board, the County Commission and eventually the state, could prescribe architectural and landscaping parameters; retrofit sewer systems; mandate road paving and the installation of curbs, gutters and sidewalks; regulate where different types of commercial or industrial businesses could operate; require developers to share large retention ponds; create and enforce sign ordinances; and designate cultural, recreational and residential areas. Other than existing county, state and federal law, only imagination limits the proposed committee's vision. Goodin was careful to stress that existing properties and businesses would be "grandfathered in," meaning they would not be obligated to comply with new ordinances. But, he added, he believes existing businesses will make the improvements voluntarily as the surrounding area begins to look better.

"There's a lot of different ways to make this happen," Goodin said, adding that interested residents should attend a revenue modeling workshop that starts at 9 a.m. Feb. 6 at the County Administrative Center in Milton. The workshop was scheduled to address ways to increase the County's revenues, but the discussion also could help groups that rely on government assistance.

One of the ideas Goodin expects to be discussed is a community redevelopment authority (CRA), which he believes would be an excellent vehicle for realizing the steering committee's vision. A CRA would let the County use tax-increment financing (TIF) to fund improvements in the town center. TIF lets property owners benefiting from improving property values help pay for CRA projects adding value to their homes and businesses, Goodin said. Unlike impact fees, charged to new developers to offset the cost of infrastructure required by the new development, and property taxes, which assess the same millage rate regardless of assessed value, TIF tracks the increase in property value and property taxes paid. If the amount increases from one year to the next, the County commits the difference to the CRA for continued redevelopment.

The CRA also could take advantage of grants and other funding opportunities currently not available to the County. When the initial steering committee's work was done, Goodin said a core group should continue overseeing the committee's initiatives and making decisions on issues as they arise. If a CRA is created, he said, state statute requires an elected board to oversee the Authority's business.

But the steering committee shouldn't be political, he said.

"I don't want it to be politically appointed," Goodin said. He did offer suggestions, though, of who he thought should be involved: the Master Gardeners for their expertise with landscaping; the Pioneer Association to ensure building codes

"This is not a new idea. It's been talked about conceptually for 10 years or more. Now it's time to do something, or Navarre as we know it will cease to exist."

Gordon Goodin
Commissioner, District 4

protect and encourage styles traditional to Northwest Florida ("All of Florida is not Miami," Goodin said.); the Holley-Navarre Water System to answer water, sewer and storm water questions; the Navarre Area Board of Realtors to help protect against inadvertently lowering existing property values; the Navarre Beach Area Chamber of Commerce for input from the business community; the Santa Rosa County Tourist Development Council, because the town center will be the "Gateway to Navarre Beach"; and county staff, including Beckie Faulkenberry, director of the Community Planning, Development and Zoning Department, and County Engineer Roger Blaylock. As soon as it's able, Goodin said, the committee should hire an urban design consultant or architect to help create the committee's vision and show it how to reach its goals. Sue Peters-Ferree of Navarre asked Goodin and the Commission to make sure residents are represented on the committee.

Goodin said all of the committee's meetings would be open to the public and the public would have plenty of opportunities to make its feelings known.

Goodin said he wasn't trying to enforce his vision for Navarre on anyone; he said he wants the residents of Navarre to create their own vision. Goodin said his role has been to present the idea to enough people that the project would gain its own momentum.

"This is not a new idea," he said. "It's been talked about conceptually for 10 years or more. Now it's time to do something, or Navarre as we know it will cease to exist."

Navarre Press March 18, 2004

County schedules meeting to discuss Navarre Town Center

By Ken Garner
Navarre Press

Commissioner Gordon Goodin, who represents the southeast part of Santa Rosa County, has touted his vision of orderly growth "for Navarre, by Navarre."

But, in the beginning at least, Milton will have to help.

County Planning and Zoning Director Becky Faulkenberry and transportation planner Kacey Wagg will present "Navarre Town Center" during a public meeting beginning at 6 p.m. Thursday March 25 at the Holley-Navarre Middle School library.

Goodin will provide some information about the town center concept, but he has said he doesn't want to be directly involved with developing local ordinances to guide everything from landscaping and signs to land use. He is interested in hearing from residents about how they would like to see Navarre develop.

"This is not a new idea. It's been talked about conceptually for 10 years or more. Now it's time to do something, or Navarre as we know it will cease to exist," Goodin said earlier this year. "The urgency I sense with the four-laning of State Road 87 makes it important that we act now. This isn't something we can wait around about."

Goodin tentatively dubbed the area Navarre Town Center and said he imagined it would cover about 2.5 miles along U.S. Highway 98, from Williams Creek Drive on the west to the Baptist Medical Park-Navarre on the east, and extend along State Road 87 toward nearby Holley.

Existing structures should be "grandfathered," or protected, from any new requirements devised by the Navarre Town Center planning committee, which Goodin expects will be comprised of business and community leaders with the help of the County's planning and engineering staffs.

The recommendations, which would have to be approved by the Local Planning Board, the County Commission and eventually the state, could prescribe architectural and landscaping parameters; retrofit sewer systems; mandate road paving and the installation of curbs, gutters and sidewalks; regulate where different types of commercial or industrial businesses could operate; require developers to share large retention ponds; create and enforce sign ordinances; and designate cultural, recreational and residential areas. Other than existing county, state and federal law, only imagination limits the proposed committee's vision.

Goodin said all of the committee's meetings would be open to the public and the public would have plenty of opportunities to make its feelings known.

A news release from the County emphasized the importance of residents' input; the more people who participate in the process, the more the final product will reflect the community.

By Navarre, for Navarre.

For information before the meeting, contact Faulkenberry at 850-981-7057, or in South Santa Rosa County, call 939-1259 and ask for Planning and Zoning.

Navarre Press March 25, 2004

Two Navarre Town Centers being planned?

By Ken Garner

Navarre Press

"Navarre Town Center" is the working title for not one, but two projects expected to shape the booming community centered generally around the intersection of U.S. Highway 98 and State Road 87.

Santa Rosa County Commissioner Gordon Goodin introduced the idea of a committee of Navarre residents working with County staff to guide the community's development "for Navarre, by Navarre." Planning and Zoning Director Becky Faulkenberry and Transportation Planner Kasey Wagg will lead the first meeting of this Navarre Town Center group beginning at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Holley-Navarre Middle School Library.

The second Navarre Town Center is more mysterious.

Navarre Press learned that a nationwide investment banking company, The Marshall Group, has listed "Navarre Town Center" on its Current Offerings page at its Web site: http://www.marshallgroupinc.com/Current_Offerings.asp.

The listing identifies investment opportunities in an \$8.7-million project on Navarre Beach for land acquisition and refinance.

Officials familiar with development proposals for Navarre Beach offered no specific information, but Navarre Beach Deputy Fire Chief Kevin Rudski confirmed that a group is considering developing the property, and confirmed the property under consideration is a 21.6-acre vacant parcel directly north of the Holiday Inn with frontage on Santa Rosa Sound.

Rudski wouldn't offer any other information.

"When they're ready to market it, it'll be in their best interest to let you know," he said.

According to tax records, Florida Gulf Coast Properties Inc., of Pensacola acquired the lease for \$3.2 million in 1997 and assigned the lease to Christopher A. Ferrara of Baton Rouge, La.

Tom Grady, Director of Marketing for The Marshall Group, did not return a call asking for more information about the listing. Faulkenberry said that as of yet no one had come forward with a site plan for approval.

Navarre Press April 1, 2004

Large crowd attends meeting to begin planning Navarre's future

By Ken Garner
Navarre Press

About 120 people started recreating Navarre on Thursday.

Santa Rosa County Commissioner Gordon Goodin, Planning, Zoning and Development Director Becky Faulkenberry and transportation planner Kacey Wagg led the first meeting of what has been dubbed the "Navarre Town Center" project. Goodin has been the biggest advocate of having a group of local residents help shape Navarre's future by developing a growth plan "for Navarre, by Navarre."

Curious residents, and a few interested parties from outside Navarre, filled the Holley-Navarre Middle School library to see how people begin shaping their community's future.

The first step: tickling the imagination. Residents were separated randomly into four "buzz groups," then sent to different areas of Holley-Navarre Middle School where they spent about 45 minutes discussing the same set of questions designed to get people talking about what is good and bad about Navarre, what should change and what shouldn't.

After answering the questions, the groups dissolved and the residents regrouped in the library, where a person from each group presented his or her group's answers.

Reducing and/or slowing traffic on U.S. Highway 98, allowing restaurants to serve alcoholic beverages, attracting better shopping and improving storm water drainage were popular suggestions. Others included concentrating shopping in two "mini" town centers, building a pedestrian bridge from Navarre Park across U.S. Highway 98, adopting a stringent sign ordinance, allowing existing businesses a grace period to meet new standards instead of "grandfathering" them, developing a town square, studying incorporation, attracting a college and providing activities for area youth, such as a bowling alley or movie theater.

Introducing the plan, Goodin warned the potential volunteers what they were trying to do wouldn't be easy, and it wouldn't show immediate results.

"Navarre didn't get the way it is overnight, it won't change into anything different overnight," Santa Rosa County Commissioner Gordon Goodin said at the first Navarre Town Center meeting.

But it will change, he said, and told the group to remember they were trying to make Navarre a better place for future generations, not themselves.

No boundaries have been identified, but the Town Center will lie along U.S. Highway 98, probably from Williams Creek Drive to Baptist Medical Park, north on State Road 87 to County Road 399 and to Santa Rosa Sound on the south, although some suggested including Navarre Beach as part of the Town Center.

The Board of County Commissioners gave the go-ahead and Faulkenberry and Wagg went to work organizing the first meeting.

Wagg moderated the meeting and introduced the plan she and Faulkenberry had developed, which includes creating four working groups: architectural standards, infrastructure development, landscaping and land use.

After the meeting, residents could sign up for one or more of the committees or a fifth group unable to make a firm commitment to any of the committees but who want to stay informed about the project. The chairpersons of each group will form a steering committee that will coordinate the committees and bring the proposals together into a single report for presentation to the Board of County Commissioners. As approved, the Board will assign the projects to the appropriate county staff for implementation.

Wagg said the four committees would probably meet once or twice a month; the goal is to have the final document ready for approval by July or August. She said more public meetings will probably occur before the document's finished.

"We're here with as blank a slate as really possible," Wagg said. "We're waiting for you to fill it up."

Navarre Press

April 1, 2004

In Our Opinion

Designing Navarre's future - creating a legacy

What do you think Navarre will look like in 20 years? What should it look like?

Santa Rosa County Commissioner Gordon Goodin, transportation planner Kacey Wagg and Development Director Becky Faulkenberry asked about 120 people these questions Thursday at a meeting to introduce the Navarre Town Center concept.

In not too many months, the widening of State Road 87 will be finished, complete with sidewalks and street lights. But what's to prevent the newly-improved road from becoming lined with retention ponds and metal buildings?

Goodin wondered the same thing, and it bothered him. It bothered him enough that he looked for an answer, and found one. More importantly, he voiced it to whomever would listen and, finally, he took it to the Board of County Commissioners. The commissioners agreed with the forehead-slapping good sense of Goodin's proposal: Let the people of Navarre form a committee, identify the unincorporated community's boundaries and draft a set of ordinances and policies to guide development inside those boundaries. Of course, for those rules to be enforceable, they must be passed by the Board of County Commissioners.

No matter. The idea of mapping our community's future – a future “for Navarre, by Navarre” – is empowering, and the possibility of that power was introduced at Thursday's meeting.

To get volunteers more familiar with one another, and into the spirit of what might be, Wagg and Faulkenberry divided the overflow crowd into four groups and sent them to different rooms to answer a set of questions. Everyone regrouped 45 minutes later to compare notes. At the end of the meeting, volunteers were asked to sign up for one or more of four specific groups: architectural design, infrastructure, landscaping or land use. But on the first night, no limits were imposed on anyone's imagination.

Among the ideas we liked at Thursday's brain-storming session: Creating a town square. We don't know if it's practical, but town squares generate a sense of community. We associate town squares with courthouses, but a passive park with a fountain and statue, some shade trees and plenty of benches, with little retail shops and offices, maybe a diner or book store or even an Internet café on the blocks surrounding the park, would be a nice addition to Navarre.

- Designate a smaller “heart of the city” inside the larger Town Center would be another possibility.
- Attract a college branch and other cultural attractions, such as a museum or theater.
- Adopt strict sign ordinances. Business owners have a right to advertise, but residents have a right not to be battered with a barrage of colorful, large, distracting signs in their neighborhood's commercial district.
- Develop an expanded boardwalk running along Santa Rosa Sound, with observation decks and benches spaced along the way and a large deck area near Navarre Park for outdoor celebrations. Sure, this one is a long shot, but we think it would be lovely.
- Ensure streets are paved and well-lighted and sidewalks are installed.
- Provide “pocket parks,” complete with basketball goals and courts, around the community to make sure children have places to play. Too many children in Navarre simply wander the streets when school's not in session, and too many portable basketball goals are set up facing the street, so the road is the court.
- Create greater interconnectivity between subdivisions to allow better traffic flow throughout the “grid” north of U.S. Highway 98.
- Develop architectural guidelines for businesses and homes along major roads and in the “heart of the city” that allow enough flexibility that the buildings don't look like an overgrown subdivision, but that are strict enough to communicate a common theme. Col. Guy Wyman's wife named Navarre for a province in northeast Spain, for example, and the Spanish colonized Pensacola in the 16th century. Most of Navarre's streets have Spanish names. It might be appropriate to investigate the architecture of the first Navarre (once its own kingdom, but that's a story for another issue) and see if it is suitable and compatible with our community. Northwest Florida's pioneer heritage or the area's touristy beach industry also might provide inspiration.

- Develop an Alternate U.S. Highway 98. This is another goal that seems beyond the Town Center's reach, but as long as we're dreaming

The four working groups will meet once or twice a month for the next several months, with the chairmen of each group forming a steering committee to coordinate the work. The coming meetings probably won't be as much fun or filled with the same pioneering sense of the first one, and they shouldn't be. It will be hard work to reach a consensus of how Navarre should grow, and look, and what its character should be.

Some volunteers Thursday quite obviously have selfish agendas. That's OK. We hope, though, that those people will keep open minds while we work through this process. The decisions made by these committees will not greatly affect many of our lives. The work these committees do now will decide to a great degree what kind of Navarre our children and grandchildren will know.

We believe the people of Navarre have a great opportunity. Don't take it for granted. Don't let it slip away, and don't let this project turn into another dusty plan in a plastic-coated three-ringed binder setting on a shelf in Milton.

Navarre was a kingdom once, in Spain. We believe she can be one again, right here in the Panhandle.

Navarre Press

April 8, 2004

In Our Opinion

Commission handicaps Navarre Town Center

Santa Rosa County Commission Chairman Don Salter inadvertently may have crippled the Navarre Town Center working groups before their first meetings.

After a lengthy and one-sided public hearing March 29 about a request for increased density on several acres of Santa Rosa Sound's north shore, Salter suggested tabling the request until the Navarre Town Center steering committee produced its recommendations on architectural design, infrastructure, landscaping and, more to the point, land use. A motion was made, and the Commission approved tabling developer Jimmy Speigner's request to rezone about 7 acres from highway commercial district (HCD) to planned urban development (PUD) in order to build three three-story buildings with 204 condominiums.

Of 25,000 or so residents who call Navarre home, about 300 were present. Roughly 70 percent of those Navarrites in attendance opposed Speigner's project and applauded Salter's solution. How very short-sighted.

Commissioner Gordon Goodin represents southeast Santa Rosa County, including all of Navarre. He voted against tabling Speigner's request after his motion to approve the rezoning died without a second. The next morning, in a telephone interview, Goodin vented his frustration: "My biggest fear is, we just killed the Navarre Town Center."

The Town Center concept, pushed by Goodin and taken over by the County Planning, Zoning and Development Department, is supposed to be an opportunity for residents to decide what Navarre is and will be by defining boundaries and agreeing on sets of standards in the four areas mentioned above. Some residents who attended the Town Center's March 25 informational and organizational meeting suggested more ambitious projects: passing an ordinance that would allow Navarre restaurants to sell alcoholic beverages, joining the effort to build an alternate to U.S. Highway 98, creating "pocket parks" for neighborhood children, building a pedestrian overpass to Navarre Park and expanding the boardwalk there ... even studying incorporation.

But Salter's suggestion, and the Commission's split vote (Salter, Robert Cole and Buck Lee for and Goodin and Robert Hilliard against tabling the developer's request), likely dashed any chance the Town Center committees have to reach consensus on virtually any issue. Diverting the zoning decision to inexperienced, as yet unorganized volunteers was irresponsible and inexcusable.

The three commissioners who tabled the motion can tell anyone dissatisfied with whatever happens to Speigner's South Beach Condominiums proposal they took the most democratic path by turning the matter over to the people of Navarre.

Nonsense. We believe the Commission abdicated its authority out of political expediency. Even if the Town Center committees produce a recommendation and the Commission votes on it, commissioners can deflect criticism by saying they followed the will of the people.

Speigner can pursue a less desirable project on the property under existing zoning; HCD allows a wide variety of uses, including hotels with almost no limits on capacity; storage facilities, fast food restaurants; and others. Speigner needs to find a project that will recoup the \$2 million he and his partners have an option to invest in the 10-lot parcel.

Although it's not likely, it is entirely possible he would decide to develop each lot separately. Even if Planning and Zoning forced each business to use a single drive, the traffic impact would be catastrophic. And he could do that right now without any input from the County Commission.

We do not favor unbridled growth; we are as frustrated by traffic snarls, metal buildings, and infrastructure improvements lagging behind needs as any Navarre resident. But we recognize that erecting walls topped with razor wire around our community (whatever its boundaries may be) is not an answer. This is a beautiful part of our nation, and people from across the country - and overseas - want to live here for the same reasons we do: natural beauty, good schools, relatively inexpensive cost of living ... some residents have complained loudly "we were here first." Tell that to the Native Americans.

So people are going to come, needing homes in which to live, with children to educate, jobs in Pensacola or Fort Walton Beach requiring commutes, and businesses to start in Navarre. Instead of tilting at zoning windmills, residents need to help local government shape reasonable, community-friendly growth. That, we believe, is the purpose of the Navarre Town Center.

Instead, the Town Center is poised to become a battleground for our community's future. The "no-growth," "slow-growth" and "pro-growth" factions already are trying to stack the Town Center committees with their operatives. So-called "natives" who've lived in the area more than 10 years typically oppose any change that threatens to further erode the character of their once-idyllic seaside village. Their mantra seems to be "Don't build it; they won't come." Another group, typically recent imports who recognize Navarre for what it is, what it could be and what it will be if growth isn't managed, are less vocal and less eager to defend their position. But they understand "quality growth" does not mean "no growth."

NIMBYs (Not In My Backyard) cite the threat to Navarre's "small town atmosphere" as a reason to deny new development. Small town atmosphere? Navarre has the atmosphere of a strip mall; a strip mall with 25,000 residents. One of the challenges facing us is defining our character. We do not believe the NIMBYs have that goal at heart; rather, they selfishly and shortsightedly want to keep change at bay. As we've said before, that isn't possible. By taking such an extremist attitude, change seeps in through the cracks, a little at a time, until our community looks like a greatly magnified version of what it looks like now - a conglomeration of mismatched buildings and uses and rancid retention ponds and garish signs and rusting metal storage buildings.

We hope the Navarre Town Center volunteers can acknowledge the need for responsible planning and move ahead without becoming polarized by the growth-no growth debate. As Goodin said following the meeting, the Commission didn't do Navarre any favors by placing such weighty and controversial responsibility on the Town Center volunteers' shoulders before any of the committees have met.

But, as a woman at the Town Center informational meeting said during a discussion of the community's strengths, Navarre's residents are capable; if it needs done, we'll find a way to do it.

The Navarre Town Center plan needs to be done, and done right.

Navarre Press
April 15, 2004**Town Center groups to meet**
From Staff Reports

Groups working to create the Navarre Town Center Plan will begin meeting Tuesday, when the Land Use and Infrastructure groups meet at 5:30 p.m. and 7 p.m., respectively, at the Holley-Navarre Middle School Library. The Architecture and Landscaping groups will meet at 5:30 p.m. and 7 p.m., respectively, May 7, and the groups tentatively are scheduled to meet every other week at the middle school through the end of June.

Santa Rosa County Planning Director Becky Faulkenberry and Transportation Planner Kacey Wagg are coordinating the effort initiated by County Commissioner Gordon Goodin to shape the community's future. They will prepare and post agendas for the first working group meetings, which are open to the public.

Further information about the Navarre Town Center Plan is available at http://www.co.santa-rosa.fl.us/santa_rosa/zoning/ntcp.html.